

## CHAPTER 14

# FACILITY SIZE, EDUCATION, AND OTHER PERFORMANCE MEASURES

### 14.1 Introduction

The vision underlying the juvenile court from its inception at the turn of the 20th century was that of a surrogate for troubled children's parents or guardians. The court was to handle various childhood-related problems that often extended beyond mere lawbreaking. The stated intention of juvenile courts was to provide individual diagnosis and treatment of each troubled child, thus ensuring ultimate rehabilitation and full societal participation by these children. This vision of the juvenile court was unquestioned until the 1960s when reform was centered upon the development of prevention and treatment alternatives to institutions and the juvenile court altogether. The reasoning was that the juvenile court and custodial institutions would do more harm than good by labeling and stigmatizing troubled children as delinquent, thereby contributing to subsequent delinquent behavior patterns. The resulting reforms of diversion and deinstitutionalization were aimed at keeping children out of the formal juvenile justice system and, thus, avoiding delinquent labels, stigmas, and subsequent delinquent behavior.

Beginning in the 1980s and continuing today, a "get tough" approach to the treatment of offenders has resulted in an increasing number of youths being treated as adults. Specifically, youth offenders are increasingly being subject to adjudication in adult courts rather than juvenile courts and confined in adult or adult-like institutions. For example, Florida, beginning in 1996 following the recent vacating of the *Bobby M.* consent decree, which required Florida to reduce its juvenile justice institutional populations, embarked upon the development of larger and more secure custody institutions with populations of 150 or more. These facilities closely resemble adult prisons. Increased facility size and custodial character present a number of important policy questions related to juvenile justice education and other treatment outcomes. Specifically, if Florida is to continue to develop and operate larger juvenile justice facilities, what consequences will this have for the education provided to youths in those facilities? Stated differently, how will juvenile justice education fare as Florida continues to move away from smaller facilities and toward larger and more custody oriented facilities?

In examining the literature addressing juvenile justice facility size and educational outcomes, the reported results are fragmented and overly general (see JJEEP's 2000 Annual Report for a detailed overview of the literature). As a result, the specific effects of facility size are generally unclear, which gives little guidance to decision-makers. This chapter seeks to identify key issues and available data that relate to facility size and the impact that facility size has upon education and various other outcomes.

The chapter is comprised of three subsequent sections. Section 14.2 identifies and delineates the various dimensions of facility size and discusses pertinent concerns regarding each of the identified dimensions. Section 14.3 presents data on Florida facilities. Section 14.4 provides a summary discussion of the chapter and concludes with identification of future research needs related to this important policy area.

## **14.2 Dimensions of Facility Size**

There are different dimensions to the concept “facility size.” One dimension is the number of youths in a facility. Another dimension is the total square footage and the physical design of a facility, and a third is a ratio of these two dimensions; that is, a ratio of number of youths to square feet. Each dimension raises different concerns for the administration of juvenile justice facilities, and each will be discussed separately in the following sections.

### **Physical Design**

A fundamental perception underlying juvenile justice is recognition that youths are different from adults. This difference has been addressed in the program offering and physical design of juvenile institutions. One of the key distinctions between juvenile and adult facilities is the size of housing units, with larger units common in adult jails and prisons and smaller units utilized in juvenile facilities (Witke, 1999). Housing units with capacities of 25 to 40 are common in adult facilities, whereas, juvenile facilities commonly employ housing units of 12 to 16 residents. Juvenile programs try to avoid larger resident groups because larger groups of youths are more difficult to manage, and it is more difficult to move larger groups for various program activities. Smaller group size in juvenile facilities is important for classification reasons, and it enhances the staff’s ability to get to know the youths living in their areas and work effectively with them. Smaller housing units also minimize the institutionalized feeling of large dormitories.

Another key distinction between juvenile and adult facilities is that juvenile facilities ostensibly provide a normative or non-institution-like environment. That is, the environment should be as normal as possible in appearance, rather than institutional, to encourage positive behavioral responses from youths (Witke, 1999). Until recently, juvenile justice institution designers saw their chief role as producing environments that encourage better behavior and facilitate rehabilitation (Russell, 1998; Niedringhous & Goedert, 1998). Recently, there has been a philosophical shift in the planning and design of juvenile facilities that has followed the general trend toward tougher penalties for youth offenders (Niedringhous & Goedert, 1998). New juvenile correctional facilities are larger and better equipped with security hardware and technology and exhibit features similar to those found adult facilities (Roush & McMillen, 2000).

Site selection is another complex decision jurisdictions face when developing juvenile facilities. Many communities resist having a facility located near their homes for fear that the neighborhood will be unsafe and that property values will decline. As a result, planners may have to select remote sites that are incompatible with operational needs, such as public

access, adequate land area, proximity to the population served, proximity to courts, and compatibility of adjacent land uses (Roush & McMillen, 2000). Being located in remote areas is particularly germane to large institutions, which typically require more space than is available in most communities. Facilities in these remote areas typically end up being staffed by underpaid and undertrained individuals who are culturally and ethnically different than the population they serve (Roush & McMillen, 2000). Additionally, transition back into the community may be more difficult when the facility is not located in the community from which the youths came since distant locations may alienate youths from their families and the institutions in their home communities. Successful reentry into the community plays a key role in reducing recidivism.

Many decisions must be made when planning and building a juvenile justice facility. In the past, decision makers operated under the belief that youths are different from adults, but the current thinking calls for harsher treatment of youths in a manner similar to that of adults. This has been reflected in the design and program offering of juvenile justice institutions and is emerging as a prototype in Florida despite numerous policy and unresolved performance questions.

## **Density/Crowding**

Two related concerns are that of density and crowding. While density is a physical condition, crowding is a subjective feeling that people may experience when density reaches a certain level.

There is general agreement that crowding in various settings and among different populations produces negative effects. Research and experience typically show that most people do not like crowds and crowded conditions. Crowding is an especially acute problem when experienced by confined populations who do not have the opportunity to remove themselves from the situation. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence indicates that crowding in juvenile facilities is a problem and that crowding contributes to unhealthy and unsafe conditions for both the youths and the staff. High density and crowding have been studied in relation to a number of factors. Some of that research is briefly summarized below.

In an article outlining trends in juvenile detention, the researchers attribute crowded conditions for the severe curtailment of education services in some facilities and the limitation of those services in other facilities (Wordes & Jones, 1998). Burrell (1998) details the conditions in one crowded detention center and portrays education as “a privilege.” She states that there is space in the school for about half of the students and that youths only receive three hours of academic work daily.

Nearly half of the youths confined in juvenile detention centers, reception centers, training schools, and ranches are detained in overcrowded facilities (Parent et al., 1994). As discussed above, crowding has negative consequences. Furthermore, crowding often obfuscates the purpose of the juvenile justice system. That is, crowding subverts the ability of juvenile justice facilities to provide for the care and treatment of youths in accordance with their individual needs because programming and services cannot adequately be

provided. When crowding increases, incarceration becomes warehousing, the ability to classify youths diminishes, (Toch, 1985) and security is given priority over programming. In particular, educational services, including vocational and life-skills training, are often truncated, thereby diminishing the capacity of youths to gain the skills necessary for successful re-entry into the community.

## **Number of Youths**

The third dimension of facility size involves the sheer number of youths within a facility. This is a salient issue since the trend in Florida seems to be toward larger juvenile institutions. In 2001, the average population of facilities in Florida was 55 youths with newer facilities being built with over 100 beds. This follows the “get tough” trend in the treatment of youths, and it is imperative to examine the effects this trend may have.

As discussed in JJEEP’s 2000 Annual Report, a review of criminal justice literature indicates that it is generally acknowledged that larger juvenile institutions are problematic, at best, and detrimental or destructive at worst. Overall, professional statements and the criminal justice literature indicate that smaller facilities are better than larger facilities as the context for implementing various treatments and in the reduction of recidivism. Education, however, is not addressed specifically in relation to facility size in the juvenile justice literature. As a result, the education literature was reviewed to determine the effects of school size on outcomes.

Overall, studies conducted in the last 30 years have found school size to have an independent negative effect on exam performance measures and student participation, satisfaction, discipline, and attendance. That is, as school size increases, exam scores decrease, and other outcomes are adversely affected as well. It seems reasonable that these findings are applicable to juvenile justice populations, who are arguably a special group of students. Children with disabilities, especially learning disabilities, are over-represented in the juvenile correctional population (Leone, et al., 1991). High-risk populations, such as these, are especially vulnerable to the impact of institution size.

## **14.3 Data in Florida**

As previously stated, Florida is moving toward larger facilities. While only 18 of the 203 facilities JJEEP reviewed in 2001 housed 101 or more youths, nearly a third of juvenile justice students were served by these facilities. It is important, therefore, to determine the consequences that being in a large facility has upon the youths in such facilities. Quality assurance (QA) scores for programs grouped by their maximum capacities are presented in Table 14.3-1. As evidenced by the scores, there is not a clear trend upwards or downwards as each subsequent category is considered. The largest facilities, however, have the lowest overall mean QA score.

**Table 14.3-1: Overall Mean QA Scores by Size of the Facility**

Number of Students	Number of Programs	Transition	Service Delivery	Administration	Contract Management*	Overall Mean
1 – 20	42	5.33	5.86	5.49	5.29	5.56
21 – 30	32	5.09	5.32	5.35	4.82	5.29
31 – 50	47	5.13	5.65	5.49	5.13	5.42
51 – 100	33	5.39	5.79	5.73	5.36	5.62
Over 100	13	4.73	5.57	5.30	4.31	5.27

\*Standard Four: Contract Management is not included in the overall mean.

Table 14.3-2 presents the findings of facility size in relation to recidivism. A program’s recidivism score is calculated as the proportion of total youths released from that program between July 1, 1999 and June 30, 2000, inclusive, who had any adjudicated referral within one year from their exact release date. The recidivism scores presented are weighted averages of the scores for each facility within each size category. While a clear linear trend is not apparent in the results, larger facilities have the highest recidivism score.

**Table 14.3-2: Recidivism Scores by Size of the Facility**

Number of Students	Recidivism Score
1 – 20	.38
21 – 30	.41
31 – 50	.39
51 – 100	.38
Over 100	.43

Future research conducted by JJEEP will look at the effect of facility size on pre- and post-academic outcomes and, subsequently, will examine the effect of academic outcomes on community reintegration, including recidivism, self report delinquency, employment, and return to school. This research will help JJEEP ascertain how education in Florida’s juvenile justice institutions likely will fare if the trend toward larger institutions continues.

## 14.4 Summary Discussion

The “get tough” era that the nation has embraced for adults now extends to youth offenders. One of the results has been the move toward larger, more prison-like facilities for youths. Florida is no exception to this trend as newer facilities are in excess of 100 beds and are designed with security as a top priority. The research highlighted in this chapter demonstrates the negative consequences of larger facilities on education and other outcomes in schools and juvenile justice facilities. Specifically, larger schools have a negative impact on exam performance measures and student participation, satisfaction, discipline, and attendance. Larger juvenile justice institutions frequently have high recidivism rates and low

success implementing various treatments. Whether one considers the square footage in a facility, the number of youths in a facility, or measures of density/crowding, the accumulated research evidence supports the notion that larger facilities have negative consequences.

Facility size is an important area for JJEEP to consider because one of the negative effects that have been documented is that of larger institution size on education. As the agency that monitors the educational services of juvenile justice institutions in Florida, policy decisions that affect the quality of education provided in these institutions is germane to the mission of JJEEP. Not only is quality education important in and of itself, but there is also a well-established link between education and delinquency. If education is negatively impacted by larger facility size, increased delinquency and other anti-social behaviors are likely results. Preliminary analyses using JJEEP data show that larger facilities have lower overall mean QA scores and higher recidivism scores.

Research shows that small, community-based programs seem to offer the greatest hope for rehabilitating youth offenders by equipping them with the skills necessary for successful community reintegration. The smaller environment allows staff to work more closely with each youth, thereby providing more individualized treatment. The smaller environment also allows for greater emphasis on treatment rather than security. Because community-based programs are located in the community, they allow easier access for parents, often resulting in greater parental involvement, and they potentially make transition back into the community occur more smoothly. Moreover, given the demonstrated increased effectiveness of smaller facilities, long term and substantial cost savings are a likely result.

The trend toward larger schools that has occurred over the past 50 years and the resulting poor performance of those schools as measured by numerous indicators has led politicians and others to call for education reform. For example, education reform has been at the top of the President's agenda. This is important for policy makers to recall as decisions regarding juvenile justice facility size are being made. Florida has experienced much success since the reforms resulting from *Bobby M.* Subsequent legislation has mandated DOE to conduct education QA reviews and the resulting data are used to revise the QA standards in an effort to increase quality education. If the trend toward larger facilities continues in Florida, we risk losing the gains we have made since *Bobby M.*